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Subira Gordon, ConnCAN  
Children's Committee Public Hearing  
March 9, 2021  
Regarding Bill: SB2

Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 2  
An Act Concerning Social Equity and Health, Safety and Education of Children

Good Afternoon Co-chairs Senator Anwar and Representative Linehan, Ranking Members Senator Martin and Representative Dauphinais. My name is Subira Gordon and I am the Executive Director of ConnCAN.

Much of the conversation regarding education is about “getting back to normal.” We want to reopen schools, restart athletics, re engage in extracurricular activities. So our goals center on using resources and time to mitigate the issues caused by Covid-19 and start up again. What if, instead of focusing on going back to what was, we take this opportunity to reimagine an education model that is more flexible, more supportive, and more equitable?

Connecticut suffers from one of the largest opportunity gaps in America. Our black and brown students, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities face systemic barriers to their success, often overcoming hurdles to achieve the equal results compared to their English speaking, non-disabled white peers. Now is the time to make significant investments in our schools to dramatically reduce our opportunity gaps, and achieve greater outcomes for all of our students, regardless of their background.

SB2, along with HB6556 and SB948 (both currently in the education committee) are Connecticut's opportunities to transform education for our students, especially those living in under resourced communities. In some cases, SB2 sets the groundwork for substantial change. However, we think there are opportunities to consider broader, more substantial legislation to meet the moment.

First, SB2 outlines the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screenings for young people. This work is essential in understanding the level of trauma a child has experienced and the necessary resources a district must provide to a school with high

concentrations of children facing trauma. With this knowledge, we can create a more supportive, understanding and responsive educational environment for our students.

Next, this legislation alters important language regarding social and emotional learning, and mental health awareness for young people. This past year has been challenging for our young people. They had to rapidly change their entire lives, learning from home rather than school, seeing family members virtually rather than at gatherings, and in some cases, experiencing loss and financial hardship. Our students have been deeply impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and will have to receive increased social and emotional support to get back on the right track.

However, there are areas for improvement for this legislation.

First, this bill focuses primarily on attendance and excused vs. unexcused absences. We know that measuring attendance is insufficient in understanding how students engage in the learning process. We must look to deepen our metrics to include student engagement and disengagement as indicators of success. We would define an engaged student as:

“a student in grade K to 12, inclusive, who participates in 75% or more of learning opportunities whether in-person, hybrid or remote by (A) signing into lessons, (B) completing assignments, and (C) participating in learning tasks.”

Second, SB2 leaves out a lot of the necessary investments we must make to meet the moment. In ConnCAN’s family survey on post-pandemic investment, families rated social and emotional supports, and academic intervention as pressing matters for their child/children. For SB2 to meet the needs of families, it should recommend key long-term mitigation strategies for academic and social-emotional learning. Right now, this legislation creates many of the reporting and system inputs, but does not directly address the policies and practices that will drive student outcomes.

ConnCAN stands ready to work on this legislation with legislative leaders, community members and families.

Thank you.

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About ConnCAN:

*Founded in 2005, ConnCAN is leading an advocacy movement to ensure that all kids in The Constitution State have access to a high-quality education, regardless of their address.*

*Our work to improve education in Connecticut springs from our belief in the immense potential found within every child and our responsibility as citizen advocates to do everything we can to ensure we have an education system that lives up to this potential.*

*We strive to be resourceful and nimble as we advance the changes our kids deserve. We aim to see every win—and every setback—as an opportunity to learn what’s working today and envision what might be possible tomorrow. We know we don’t have all the answers and that we can only succeed by constantly testing our assumptions, working in close collaboration with others and investing in an inclusive culture enlivened by diverse viewpoints from across our state.*

ConnCAN is a branch of [50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now](#).